



Act 176  
High School Completion



Division of Lifelong Learning (802) 828-3102 ♦ July 2009

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## **I. Statute Establishing the High School Completion Program**

### **Sec. 42. 16 V.S.A. § 1049a. HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAM**

(a) In this section:

(1) “Graduation education plan” means a written plan leading to a high school diploma for a person who is 16 to 22 years of age, and has not received a high school diploma, who may or may not be enrolled in a public or approved independent school. The plan shall define the scope and rigor of services necessary for the student to attain a high school diploma, and may describe educational services to be provided by a public high school, an approved independent high school, an approved provider, or a combination of these.

(2) “Approved provider” means an entity approved by the commissioner to provide educational services which may be counted for credit toward a high school diploma.

(3) “Contracting agency” means an agency that has entered into a contract with the department of education to provide adult education services in Vermont.

(b) If a person who wishes to work on a graduation education plan is not enrolled in a public or approved independent school, then the commissioner shall assign the prospective student to a high school district, which shall be the district of residence whenever possible. The school district in which a student is enrolled or to which a non-enrolled student is assigned shall work with the contracting agency and the student to develop a graduation education plan. The school district shall award a high school diploma upon successful completion of the plan.

(c) The commissioner shall reimburse, and net cash payments where possible, a school district that has agreed to a graduation education plan in an amount:

- (1) established by the commissioner for development of the graduation education plan and for other educational services typically provided by the assigned district or an approved independent school pursuant to the plan, such as counseling, health services, participation in cocurricular activities, and participation in academic or other courses, provided this amount shall not be available to a district that provides services under this section to an enrolled student; and
- (2) negotiated by the commissioner and the contracting agency, with the approved provider, for services and outcomes purchased from the approved provider on behalf of the student pursuant to the graduation education plan.

## **II. Purpose and Structure of the High School Completion Program**

The purpose of the High School Completion Program (HSCP) is to provide youth, ages 16-21, who may be enrolled or unenrolled in school, with educational services of the scope and rigor needed for the attainment of a high school diploma. The challenge is to design individual graduation education plans that offer young people engaging and effective learning opportunities that fit the personal needs and interests of each student. These learning opportunities can be provided by a wide range of organizations, such as local high schools, adult education and literacy providers, and other approved providers. These providers may include colleges and community agencies offering educational services such as community action programs, parent/child centers, teen parent education programs, technical training programs, homeless programs, youth employment programs and private schools.

The 2006 Vermont Legislature established the HSCP through 16 V.S.A. §1049. Requirements for the HSCP established under this statute include:

1. Any person, ages 16-21 inclusive and enrolled or not enrolled in school, is eligible to request an individual graduation education plan that defines the scope and rigor of alternative education services necessary to attain a high school diploma, and may describe educational services provided by a public/independent high school, an approved provider, or a combination of these.
2. School districts shall award a high school diploma to persons who successfully complete their approved graduation education plans.
3. The commissioner shall assign an unenrolled student who wishes to work on a graduation education plan to a high school district, which will be the district of residence whenever possible.
4. The assigned school district shall work with the statewide Adult Education & Literacy contractor and the student to develop an approved graduation education plan leading to a diploma.
5. The commissioner shall reimburse school districts and net cash payments where possible to approved providers, for delivery of services and attainment of outcomes which have been agreed to in a graduation education plan. Such services may be delivered directly by the school district or purchased by the school district on behalf of the student from an approved or other provider. Reimbursement amounts will be established by the commissioner and paid from funds appropriated from the education fund.

### III. Operational Overview

In partnership, local high schools and Learning Works, the statewide adult education and literacy system operate the High School Completion Program. High school partners have the following responsibilities:

- identify youth eligible for the program;
- participate in the development of each student's graduation education plan;
- make available to participants, those services they typically provide;
- determine the graduation requirements;
- assess satisfactory completion of student work;
- award the diploma;
- maintain fiscal account records for the program's funding and expenditures.

Learning Works partners have the following responsibilities:

- identify youth eligible for the program;
- participate in the development of each student's graduation education plan;
- directly provide educational services;
- contract with other providers for delivery of educational services;
- manage/coordinate implementation of graduation education plan for each student;
- provide student advocacy, support and guidance throughout the process;
- assess satisfactory completion of student work;
- manage student records and data entry needed for calculating reimbursement payments;
- act as primary communication liaison with the local high schools.

Any person age 16-21, who is or is not enrolled in school, and who has not attained a high school diploma is eligible to apply for participation in the High School Completion Program. Eligible youth may enter the program through many doors. The high school may counsel a student to enter the High School Completion Program. The Learning Works provider may counsel eligible youth that the HSCP might be the best alternative for their continued learning. In addition, a wide variety of community organizations that work with youth can also be the student's first point of contact for the HSCP. For example, a homeless or pregnant youth might first contact a program for homeless youth or pregnant teens. Because such community organizations provide important support for youth with special needs, often these community organizations will be contracted to deliver education services as part of the student's graduation education plan.

Once a young person who could benefit from the HSCP is identified, the Learning Works provider will facilitate development of the individual's graduation education plan. The Learning Works provider will meet with the student and identify which high school can act as the best partner and award the diploma. When possible, this should be the district of residence, but if Learning Works or the district of residence recognizes circumstances that warrant a high school other than the district of residence, then Learning Works will contact the Department of Education with a recommended high school and a request for the commissioner to assign the student to that high school. The assigned high school assumes the responsibilities defined above.

A graduation education plan identifies the learning opportunities and assessments an individual student must complete in order to earn a high school diploma from the assigned high school. It is a written plan that becomes a signed agreement between the student, the high school, and the Learning Works provider. It should set clear learning goals and include the scope and rigor of services and skill proficiency expected of a high school graduate. The graduation education plan will also identify the organization providing each of the identified services.

The graduation education plan will be recorded on a standard form. This will ensure statewide comparability while enabling individual creativity in shaping a plan that works best for the student. Each graduation education plan will include:

- profile of current transcript and basic skill proficiency in reading, writing and math;
- identification of student goals beyond high school – career, educational, personal;
- clear learning objectives that the student must accomplish in order to earn a diploma;
- plan of services (learning opportunities and assessments with evidence and performance expectations for satisfactory completion);
- identification of provider organizations responsible for delivery of specific services;
- expected date of graduation.

Each graduation education plan must identify a challenging and engaging array of learning opportunities and assessments that align with the life goals of the student and increase student engagement and retention. Each graduation education plan will be unique to the student circumstances.

The full array of educational services may be included in graduation education plans. All types of planned learning opportunities such as tutoring, courses, workshops, work-based and service learning projects, mentoring and internships that focus on secondary level academic and technical/occupational skill development can be included in a graduation education plan. Any learning activity that the assigned high school accepts as leading to attainment of graduation requirements can be included. High schools are encouraged to approve creative approaches to learning while maintaining the standards for rigor expected of their graduates. Any service traditionally provided by public high schools, including their alternative education programs, can be included in graduation education plans. Educational services purchased on behalf of the student from Learning Works, and approved and other community education providers can be included in the graduation education plan. Educational services available to the student at no cost or funded through an alternative source (e.g., VSAC counseling or enrollment in a secondary technical education program) may also be included.